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Street Porsches On The Racetrack

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Late 911s

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■ ***Above—Steve Vandecar's 911.***

■ ***Right—Tony Mazzagatti uses this roof rack to carry tires to the track.***

When Porsche racing graduates of the Class of 1955 congregate, they tend to reminisce about the days when they drove their street cars to the track and converted them to race cars right there in the paddock. Even the rich and famous ones like James Dean and Dan Gurney drove their Porsches to Santa Barbara and Willow Springs over the public highways.

It was a simple matter for them to tape up the headlights of their Speedsters, pop off their hubcaps, and bolt on their open stinger pipes in the pits. Not one of them ever considered buying a trailer and a tow rig when they started their careers in the sport. Dean, on the day he died, was *driving* his racing 550 to Salinas while his unwanted tow rig followed behind him in case its services would be needed. Unfortunately, they were.

How far have we come from those idyllic and simple days of yore? Now it takes an enclosed, 30-foot, $10,000 Wells Cargo trailer to transport your Porsche to even the smallest of club races. And don't forget the $40,000 Ford or Dodge V-10 dualie to pull the palatial, workbench-equipped trailer in the manner it deserves to be towed. By the time you're all done adding up the time and expense invested in trailering, you've spent more on the rig, its ancillaries, and the gas (at 8 miles per gallon) than you have on the race car and its entry fee. Talk about the tail wagging the dog!

Although most racers today are busy lining the pockets of trailer and truck manufacturers in a game of paddock warfare known as dragging bragging rights, a small group of enthusiasts has dissented from the commonly accepted wisdom that winning requires towing.

Porsche Club of America time trialer Tony Mazzagatti faithfully drives his 911 SC containing race tires, an E-Z Up tent, *and* his long-suffering wife Diana to all the events that comprise Golden Gate Region's time trial series. His 1982 911 SC now registers 284,000 miles on the odometer. Though it was purchased primarily as a daily driver and autocrosser, it quickly evolved into a track racer.

"You have to be a little bit of a fanatic to make your race car your street car as well, because at slow speeds in the city, this is not the most comfortable car to drive," says Mazzagatti. "Even the sound deadening pad is gone, and the suspension has been completely done. But it still has air-conditioning and a radio, and I really enjoy driving the car every day."

Though he has made certain compromises to keep his car street legal, Mazzagatti is a winner in his chosen field, with four consecutive time trial awards in Class KP competition. Mazzagatti says, "I've got lap records in my class at all four tracks we run on — Buttonwillow, Sears Point, Laguna Seca, and Thunderhill."

Doug Baron enjoys driving his modified 1986 911 Carrera so much that he wouldn't consider relegating it to trailer queen status. Now Baron is not

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Last Of The True Club Sports

These trailerless race cars allow weekend warriors to race without towing. By David Colman.

your casual, once-in-a-blue-moon kind of time trialer. In fact, he's so dedicated to racing Porsches that for the past 13 years he's tried to attend every single track event that the Porsche Owners Club has staged.

From 1985 to 1995, Baron fielded a black 1983 911 SC. He debuted the car at POC's 1985 Riverside Raceway Tribute to Peter Gregg event in bone-stock trim — no racing belts, no fire extinguisher. "The car gradually became more race worthy as time went on. It had a locked-up rear end and no air-conditioning. I could drive it to the track, but it really wasn't something I could drive to the office and be comfortable in. There's always that fine line between where a car's still streetable and where it becomes a race car. The black car was just to the point where it was streetable but not comfortable."

Ironically, when Baron finally broke down and bought a trailer and tow rig towards the end of the 1995 season, he suffered his first big accident with the 911 SC at Willow Springs. Baron replaced the double-duty SC with a dove gray 1986 911 Carrera that he continues to drive to races. The new car also followed the development route from bone stock to highly modified. Though it may have license plates, air-conditioning, and headlights, this one is even more of a thinly-veiled racer than the departed SC.

"My Carrera has a 3.6-liter 993 motor, an RSR racing clutch, Turbo brakes, a rebuilt tranny, 17-inch Kinesis wheels, bodywork, you know — all the goodies," Baron says.

But without the support net of a trailer, Baron admits that "my back-up plan for the Carrera is not to crash it." He thinks that people who have to keep their track car in one piece throughout a race weekend tend to drive a bit more conservatively than those who have the luxury of a trailer: "I'm a little more conservative when I race my street car. You just don't go ten tenths with a street car on the track if you want to drive it home."

■ ***Top—Richard Baron's 1986 Carrera race car has a 993 engine, Turbo brakes, and 17-inch wheels.***

■ ***Above—Steve Vandecar's 911 packed up for another weekend at Willow Springs Raceway.***

Bill Follmer, who used to drive his 356 to track events from 1970 to 1975, continued the tradition with 911s through 1991. During that time, Follmer, the nephew of famous 917 Can-Am driver George Follmer, recalls getting his adrenaline pumped up well before arriving at the event site.

"We used to have some pretty quick caravans to Laguna. I remember ten of us got pulled over and written up on one trip. And those runs over the Angeles Crest Highway to Willow Springs were something else. But do I miss it now? Not too much. When you get to the level of preparation my car is at, with 3.5 degrees of negative front camber, that's really uncomfortable. When we all first start-

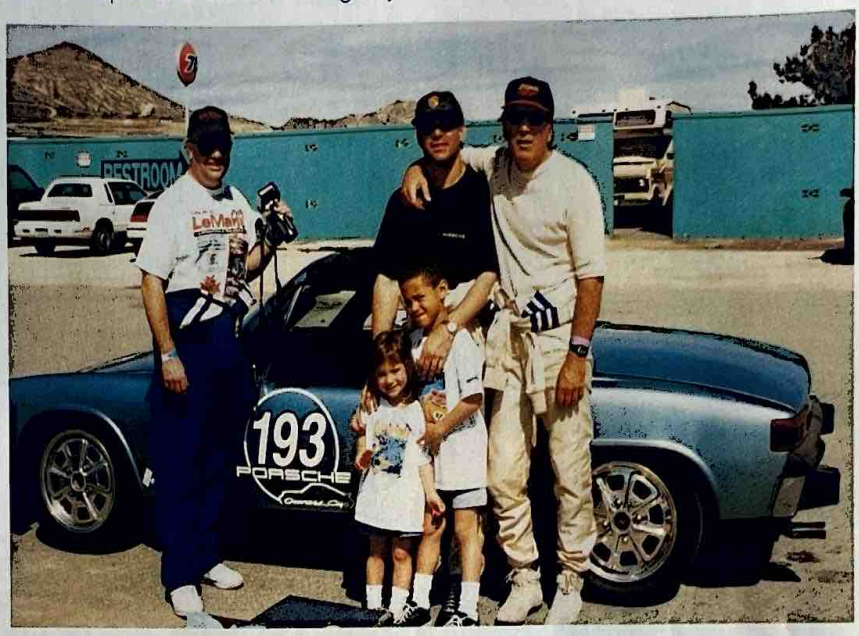
ed, we had production cars, but then it started slipping away."

Though Follmer now owns a 3/4 ton Chevy dualie and a trailer, he still occasionally drives his 1977 911S to track events. But it has no air-conditioning and its Brembo brakes, Heim joints, Eisenlohr suspension pieces, and coil-overs do make it a bit of a chore to drive through pothole zones.

"It's still a great street car, but it's a little bit darty with so much rubber and so much negative camber," says Follmer. "But it behaves very well, and I'm always pleasantly surprised." He has driven it from Los Angeles to Nevada's Silver State Classic, where he completed the course at an average speed of 142 mph, then returned home on public highways with no problems.

■ ***Right—Wayne Craparo (center) with his children, Ellen and Nicholas, and friends Dave McClintock and Lyn Zamboni.***

■ ***Below—Craparo says packing his 914-4 for weekend events is tough.***



Wayne Craparo, a POC race regular with his 914, finds packing to be the greatest challenge of the weekend. "I like the freedom to just throw our clothes in the car with a couple of bottles of water, the spare tire, and the lawn chairs in the rear trunk, with the tool box and an empty five-gallon fuel jug in the front trunk," says Craparo. "But the passenger seat is also loaded up with stuff, and I'm now starting to understand why all these guys are trailering."

Mazzagatti likens his 911 packing act to the "Ringling Brothers thing," saying, "I like to see what you can pack into the car. There's my tent, my tools, my tires, my 4x8 Sears trailer, and my 50-inch square roof basket, made of Thule bike rack parts, which holds a set of 15- or 16-inch wheels and tires. I don't carry a spare tire anymore because I wouldn't have room to store the flat one in the car." Sometimes, he leaves the roof rack on during the work week and uses his 911 for domestic chores. "If you want to start a conversation, pull up to the Home Depot and start throwing drywall and lumber on your Porsche."

Steve Vandecar, who was still working on an acceptable way to transport extra race tires to Willow Springs as we talked, says that careful allocation of space is critical to success. "There's no room in my car for anybody after I pile everything I need into it." A tool chest, a big plastic box with all my stuff, a helmet, and a clothes bag, a wood car ramp so I can set jackstands under the car, and a 2 1/4 ton floor jack make up the load. "I use the wood to make a platform behind the seats, then I pile things in there very strategically. So it's completely full, with no room for anyone else," said Vandecar as he prepared to leave for a race weekend at Willow.

Vandecar says that the main drawback to driving your car to the track is tire management. "Not trailering is definitely a disadvantage. When you're trying to get your best timed runs or win a race, you have to compete against people who have two sets of tires and save their best tires for when they want to do well. They have quite an advantage. Because I don't have extra sets, I always seem to be down on tires — real close to the treadwear bars."

One thing that doesn't phase the drive-it-yourselfers is the fear of breaking down at the track. They all seem to feel that cohorts in the club will take care of them in case of an emergency. Mazzagatti says, "I have never even thought I might be stranded someplace. I have no qualms about blowing the car up. The club is way too friendly and concerned to let that happen. I've been in six regions of PCA, and I think it's the same all over." Like Baron, Mazzagatti feels that knowing you have to drive home after the event instills a certain caution that might not otherwise exist. "If I know I've got to drive this thing home Sunday night, I don't overdrive it, I don't overstress it. The prize money isn't enough."

Robert Dalrymple takes his club racing seriously enough to spend a lot on his race-winning 911 (*Excellence*, April, 1991), but not seriously enough to take the stereo out of its dash. "I just love driving my 911 on the road," says Dalrymple. "And I've had more fun driving my car up to Laguna Seca on the back roads or on Highway 1 with friends who have Porsches than I've had anywhere but on the track itself."

Dalrymple sees little financial sense

■ ***Above—Bill Follmer's 911 borders on unbearable for the street.***

■ ***Left—Follmer lifting his inside wheel while leading a 914.***

in investing $150,000 into a car that gets trailered everywhere and is raced only seven or eight times a year. With the help of fellow POC racers Galen Bieker and Steve Alarcon, he has managed to develop the car into a POC race winner. Indisputably, his finest finish came at the 1998 POC night enduro called "Tribute to Le Mans." Dalrymple won the race outright with co-drivers Alarcon and Steve Velasquez.

When you consider that he drove the car to the race from his home in Los Angeles, then drove it home after the event as well, the result is all the more startling. The 32 teams that trailered to Willow Springs found out you don't have to tow to win.

"I guess something I'm kind of proud of is that the Tribute to Le Mans had 33 teams, and I would say that almost everybody trailered their car there. I drove to the event. I drove the car into the winner's circle, and put the stereo on and opened the sunroof — and raised a few eyebrows."

One of the rarely recognized advantages of driving your race car to the track is the accumulation of seat time such driving permits. Both Dalrymple and racer Trevor Colby agree that logging time in your car before the start of the event can have a big effect on your performance behind the wheel.

Doug Baron concurs that driving to and from events helps him refamiliarize himself with the eccentricities of the 911: "I think it gives you a psychological edge. You may not be able to drive at nine or ten tenths on the street, but it still allows you to get familiar with the car. And the more time you spend in a 911, the more familiar you become with it, and the better off you are."

Most of the drive-to-arrive set concede, however, that they have settled for less than the optimal setup in order to keep their Porsches streetable. Dalrymple, for example, says, "I've been tortured by the compromises needed to keep the car street legal. For instance, taking out weight. I have heavy doors and a full interior, and I'm probably 300 pounds heavier than all the other track cars." To compensate for the weight penalty, he decided to put more money into the engine and increased horsepower.

You might call these racers who insist on driving their Porsches to the track the last of the true club sports. These are the people Porsche has always considered their backbone enthusiasts. From the beginning at Gmünd, the company has catered to the sort of special individual willing to make some sacrifices to enjoy club sport activities.

You'll always find racers like Doug Baron, Bill Follmer, Steve Vandecar, Tony Mazzagatti, Robert Dalrymple, and Wayne Craparo on the starting grid, but you won't find a lot of superfluous equipment in their pit stalls. Don't bother with the trailer or the tow rig. Just give these guys a keenly-honed Porsche, and they'll take care of the racing bit without bothering to enter the paddock sweepstakes for Best Overall Entourage. ■